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FEDERATION OF SOCIAL WELFARE ORGANIZATIONS

The present need for co-ordination and centralization of activities extends not alone to commercial and industrial life where the urgency of the occasion has been recognized and met in what seems to the outside observer to be a surprisingly effective way, but to the world of philanthropic effort as well. In every large city hundreds of men and women are working for community welfare with admirable devotion through many organizations of a private character, each one of which must get its support from voluntary contributions. Commercial associations, united charities and central councils of social agencies may see to it that there is no serious duplication as far as aims are concerned. Ordinarily no serious overlapping in this respect can be found. But in following up its purpose each organization must undertake more or less effort for education to develop a public sentiment that will support it. Here considerable overlapping of effort occurs, and with it naturally a degree of waste. Most of these organizations must have a salaried executive secretary also, notwithstanding that one such officer could look after the administration of several of them. This is another source of waste.

A federation of privately supported social welfare organizations might solve these difficulties. It is admittedly a debatable question. Its decision can come only from actual trial of the alternatives. No one of these organizations itself can bring about a federation. There are good and sufficient reasons for that proposition. But the War Council or the Council of Defense in every city is so clearly in the public eye and so persuasive in its patriotic appeal that it can try the experiment of federation with the most favorable prospect for success. It should take the initiative in bringing together for discussion a large number of philanthropists and representatives of social welfare organizations. Here the first steps should be taken toward the formation of a grand federation of all social welfare societies in the city or perhaps two or three federations, including in each those institutions that are in their purposes more closely related than others. For instance, all those organizations that are working for the health of the community by promoting in any way public or private sanitation, hygiene or treatment might form one federation and a little study of the problem would show what others could be brought together in another federation.

But the union of these institutions under one office or in two or three divisions will be of no avail unless the federation can have back

of it the sanction of the men and women whose gifts have been the support of the organizations hitherto. They must pledge that their gifts will be made in future only through the financial agent of the federation and that they will respond to no appeals for welfare organizations excepting those that come from his office.

No organization need sacrifice its identity in the federation. It may retain its directors and officers who will from year to year make their plans and their budgets to be submitted to the office of the federation, which will make out its own budget for the whole work when the actual needs of each unit shall have been determined in a general conference, and then undertake raising the funds for apportionment among the members of the union.

Each member can thus spare the energy that it now expends upon a campaign for financial support; many could together share the service of a single executive secretary and certainly all could share to great advantage in the service of a publicity manager for the federation from whom all propaganda shall emanate and who shall be responsible also for such continuous and intensive study of all phases of the problem of social welfare in the community as will make him an authoritative referee whenever a proposal to create a new institution may arise.

As we have already said, the Council of Defense is the one institution that is big enough in the eyes of the people to make an auspicious beginning in the direction of federation of social welfare organizations. But it is for the givers themselves to determine whether, once begun, the movement shall succeed or fail. They must pledge themselves to give only through the office of the federation. The moment they break over and give support to any organization that is not within the federation, or that is denied a place in it or whose independent status is not specifically approved by the federated societies, that moment the experiment is at an end.

ROBERT H. GAULT.

NOTICE

On account of conditions that have been brought about by the war, this Journal will hereafter, during the remaining period of the war, be published as a quarterly. This number takes the place of what would be the July number under the bi-monthly plan. The next issue will appear in November.

EDITORS.